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T H E  
R E L A P S E,

A  
N O V E L.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOLUME II.

D U B L I N:

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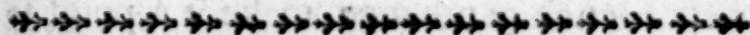
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THE  
RELAPSE,  
A  
NOVEL.



LETTER I.

LADY SCUDAMORE TO MRS. SIDLEY.

**I**F my good man continues to have the gout, and I continue in the country, I shall (Heavens! what shall I not be tempted to do!) hang myself, like a love-lorn maiden, on the first willow I meet with. If you had staid indeed—but your husband, arbitrary  
VOL. II. B wretch

wretch as he is, was so impatient to reach his own little domains.—Do you know, I think him ten times more agreeable than ever. He talks with more solidity (and at present I doat on gravity) looks with more dignity, and treats you with such manly tenderness.—I never saw you together before, you know. Positively, he has almost made me a convert to your romantic opinion. It was well Eveling was not in the way, or at this time, when one hardly knows what to do with one's self, one might have been tempted to love a little, merely *pour passer le tems*; but there is no fear of his return, since I am told his affairs are in such a train, that some honest French gentlemen make it a point to detain him amongst them,—out of politeness, no doubt. They say, he must sell his estate ere he can obtain his release.—O! with whatever levity I talk, my heart feels for him. Alas! was it not I that drove him from his country, a disconsolate wanderer?—Never till now was he known to deviate from the path of decency, of prudence, and of honour.—But I will talk no more of him.

Has your Sidley yet forgot Mrs. Palmerstone's Italian song, or her languishing graces,

so



so forcibly directed to him?—Ah! Lady Bell may tremble now indeed, at so formidable a rival.

A few words of her ladyship, now her name has dropped from my pen:—I admire her conduct; but let her take care she is not too confident of her own strength. I am glad, for all your sakes, that you are removed to a distance from her. I should not fear her correspondence with your husband, —though even that would be as well let alone; nor can I think it possible for him ever to set her person in competition with your's, or that he should ever (witty and sensible as she is) be half so much charmed with her conversation.—Nothing so affecting as the simple language of nature; nothing so touching as the accent of your remarkably harmonious voice, nor so engaging as your manner. Wit and vivacity may amuse: but love is a grave passion; softness alone can melt the heart. But then the love of variety, the vanity of being distinguished by so fine a woman, gratitude for that distinction, an unguarded moment —— In short, it is best as it is,

And now let me ask, how goes on your farm? Does Sidley suffer his hair to flow about his shoulders? Does he wear a slouch-ed hat, a brown coat, thick shoes, and an oaken cudgel, to trudge about your grounds?—And you, Madam, How does your cow and your dairy?—Or rather, to be serious, How is my sweet cousin? and when am I to embrace my godson?—Keep up your spirits, all will be well: you are an œconomist; you were formed for the shade. I hope Sidley has also learnt prudence. I wish he may not mix too much of the gentleman with the farmer. He will perhaps, at first, merely for conveniency, have a pad for you to ride to church: then, cries he, “We had better have a chaise, it will carry us both.” After that, “Hang it, I hate that tottering machine: a coach will only be a little more duty for wheels, and the cart-horses will draw it.”—So from one thing to another.

But adieu, dinner waits. Excuse this chit-chat: I fear it will not amuse you; but it serves to fill up my time, which, in my present situation, is of some consequence to her, who is ever, dear cousin,

Your's, &c.

CLARA SCUDAMORE.

LETTER



## L E T T E R II.

MRS. SIDLEY TO LADY SCUDAMORE.

**M**Y dear cousin, I have hardly power to hold my pen. I every moment expect the dreadful event.—My Sidley is all tenderness: but I have been a little ruffled; yet I think no power on earth can wean his affections from me. I am ungrateful too:—after so many obligations, she deserves my friendship; nay, I ought even to permit her, without jealousy, to enjoy my husband's. She is virtuous, her sentiments are noble; yet, at this time, I could have wished—

But I keep you in suspense, my cousin:—Lady Bell is in the country: she is in our neighbourhood.—I can no more.—The inclosed is from her ladyship: that will inform you of what I meant to tell you. Sidley changed colour; he seemed vexed: it lasted but a moment: your happy Louisa engages all his attention. He has this moment left me.—I have scribbled in haste.—My dear cousin, pray for me; I am frightened to death:—far from well indeed.—Adieu.

LOUISA SIDLEY.



THE INCLOSED FROM LADY BELL.

I AM come to claim your promise, my friend. I impatiently expect the pleasure to embrace my little godson. It surely cannot be long first.—How is my amiable Mrs. Sidley? I would wait upon her, fatigued as I am, but perhaps she is not in a condition to see company. I would not intrude unseasonably; but when she recovers, I shall often trouble you. At this fine season of the year, who would stay in town?

A little villa was advertised. I liked the description. On further enquiry, I found it was your Belmont. I did not like it the worse.—I shall reside here sometimes; but I principally intend it as a nursery for my godson.—Let me alone, you have nothing to do with him and me: as I am to promise and vow a thousand things in his name—impossibilities, by the bye, at least for me to perform—the deuce is in it if I ought not to do something.

In short, I am at Belmont; where I shall be glad to see you; and doubly so to see your better part, when the great affair is over. Adieu.

I. CONWAY.

LETTER

## L E T T E R III

LADY ISABELLA CONWAY TO MISS WEST.

**Y**OU blame me, my dear Maria; you think I do not know my own heart; you think I run into temptation, with a confidence which deserves to be punished.—Heavens! and is one for ever to be watching and examining those silly hearts of ours? I swear, one had better be without one, than put to so much trouble.

I follow my inclinations, because I believe them innocent: If I am self-deceived, how can I help it? Must I for ever live in a state of self-denial,—a denial even of what is not criminal, for fear I should be guilty of what is?—I like Mr. Sidley; I like his wife as well, I think, as him: their society gives me pleasure, and theirs only has that effect. I grow sick of the noisy town and its unmeaning insipid gaieties: I take a fancy to the country. Where is the harm of all this? I do not love absolute solitude, therefore I seek to unite myself to those whom I think worthy of being my friends. I wish to be serviceable. They are not rich: they have great delicacy, and I must be cautious

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how I communicate my favours. I wanted, for this reason, to be near them.

My passion for Sidley is very different from that which is felt by the generality of my sex: it is wholly sentimental. I love him merely for the pleasure of loving; and this love wishes to manifest itself only by contributing to his felicity:—to secure his, Louisa must be happy: I have therefore her interest as much at heart as his.

I have purchased this little estate of Belmont. He, no doubt, is partial to it: it was once his. It shall now be bestowed on his son, or his daughter; no matter which. My fortune is large; I am determined on a single life; I have no near relations to controul me, but am mistress of myself; my heart takes an interest in all that concerns the Sidleys: in promoting their happiness I shall augment my own; nay, it is now the only happiness of which I am susceptible.

Sidley's circumstances are extremely narrow; a bare subsistence. How then will he maintain an increase of family? How must such a situation prey on a feeling heart! A beloved wife and children deprived of every  
elegance,



elegance, of every amusement; buried in a dismal solitude! Shall I suffer this, when I have the means of preventing it, and when I shall reap such satisfaction?

I am quite delighted with my projects. Belmont shall be a scene of rural gaiety, which shall be diffused round all the neighbourhood: nothing shall be wanting to embellish the cottage of my friends. I wait only for the arrival of the expected stranger: then for *fêtes champêtres*! Adieu.

I have sent to enquire.—I hope Sidley will have the complaisance—but at this time, I can excuse ceremony: his whole attention is engrossed, I make no doubt, by his beloved.

Adieu.—Have I justified myself?—As far as I know my own heart, I shall never act so as to be unworthy of subscribing myself

Your's, &c.

I. CONWAY.

## LETTER IV.

THE SAME TO THE SAME.

**I**T is happily over, West; and never man was in such raptures as Sidley. One would think nobody ever had a child but himself. They bid fair, between them, to kill the little animal with fondness. It is a daughter, and the sweetest creature I ever beheld; absolutely an infant-beauty.

Sidley sent me a polite card, on my last enquiry, announcing the happy event. For one week I repressed my curiosity, and contented myself with sending every day.—No hopes of a visit from the new-made father.—Shall I own I began to think the country not quite so enchanting as my imagination had represented it? I hardly knew what to do with myself. Absolute solitude is horrid.—At the end of ten tedious days, I thought I might, without any violent impropriety, pay a friendly visit, as the lady in the straw was, as they told me, surprisingly well. I went, then; and I have positively ever since been over head and ears in love with matrimony. Such a scene *en famille* I never before beheld;—The most beautiful  
of

of all possible women, more femininely delicate than ever, dressed in white, with a propriety and taste peculiar to herself, sat with her little darling on her knee; her fine eyes tenderly fixed on it with such satisfaction. The air of her countenance seemed to say, "I ask no more, nor is it in nature that my happiness should know an increase." By her side, on the couch, was placed the enraptured Sidley, one arm thrown round her waist, gazing at the charming Madona with looks of cordial love; and never face was so well formed to express that soft passion. He looks much handsomer than when I saw him in town, though dressed in the plainest style imaginable, and his fine auburn hair, straying carelessly over his forehead, without being disguised with powder. I saw, and had leisure to examine them as the maid conducted me to the apartment, which is situated at the end of a kind of gallery, as, the weather being warm, the door was set wide open.

The moment I was announced, Sidley started up to receive me: his colour a little heightened. I believe, indeed, all our complexions suffered a transient glow. They welcomed me with great politeness; but I could

could perceive Mrs. Sidley's expressions were accompanied with a more unaffected air of kindness than those of her husband. A slight degree of embarrassment, which I could perceive, affected me, in a manner; but it was a momentary sensation, and I hemmed it away in a half-breathed sigh.

- After half an hour's chat, I rose and took leave. Sidley could do no less than offer to escort me home: I had a servant, but he politely pressed, and I, not reluctantly, yielded. I made him walk into my little elegant parlour; I shewed him my improvements in the disposal of the furniture, and by the addition of some excellent drawings. He sighed some painful recollections: but I must accustom him to the sight of his late dwelling. I intend immediately to have the writings of the estate made out, and a title to it made over to his daughter: it will be a provision for her, though not an affluent fortune; and it will save her fond parents' anxiety in regard to her future establishment in life.

O why have I been so long in discovering the true value of riches? how much happiness

ness is it in one's power to purchase, when one knows in what manner to dispose of one's treasure!—Adieu.

Your's, &c.

ISABELLA CONWAY.

LETTER



## LETTER V.

MRS. SIDLEY TO LADY SCUDAMORE.

I Have received your affectionate congratulations, my dear cousin. Indeed, I am the happiest of women.—Such a husband, and such a child! perfectly restored to health and spirits too,—what can I ask for more?

Lady Bell is much here, and never weary of manifesting, by acts of generosity absolutely distressing, the sincerity of her friendship. At first, I own, I was a little alarmed at her choosing Belmont for her residence; and Sidley was quite vexed about it: but now, I am so accustomed to see her, and so well convinced of my beloved's constancy, and I may add, so charmed with the propriety of his conduct towards her, that I no longer feel the least uneasiness, but am, on the contrary, pleased with such an agreeable neighbour; who comes and goes without ceremony: and the presence of a third person renders our conversation more lively.

Her

Her ladyship has naturally a charming flow of spirits. There is to me another conveniency in her being much with us; which is, that, when I see my Sidley and her engaged in chat, I can, without being missed, steal away, and pay a visit to my little angel. I sometimes, however, get chided for these desertions; and he tells me, half joke half serious, that I shall absolutely dwindle into a mere nurse. Lady Bell joins him, and says I shall spoil her pretty adopted. She threatens, if it engrosses me so much, and deprives Sidley and her of my company, that she will have it stolen from me, and trained up under her own directions.—I acknowledge my fault, promise amendment, make my peace, and offend again.—Dear little angel! indeed, I fear I shall love it too well.

Lady Bell is planning some rural amusements, now I am well enough, as she says, to partake of them. I would much rather be excused: reading, walking, and above all, my infant, find me sufficient employment. But she talks of balls *à-la-berger*, masquerades in the *fête champêtre* style, and the Lord knows what.—Sidley calls her a mad-cap, and says, she wants to substitute  
the

the insipid amusements of the town in the room of those which nature has, with a liberal hand, provided for them whose taste is not perverted by fashion. A fine figure, said he, shall we rustic farmers cut at a masquerade!

There are several genteel families in the neighbourhood, who all have paid their respects to her: but I have positively declared, that I will not, on any account, enlarge my acquaintance: it would be attended with a thousand inconveniences, besides being quite contrary to my inclinations. I fear our expences have already exceeded our income; for liberal as Lady Bell is, she finds it a difficult task to confer her favours. Sidley has a spirit, which nothing but absolute necessity can compel to stoop to receive obligations. It is to my child only that she can, in spite of us, manifest her generosity in any matters of consequence. He has even mortgaged a part of our very small estate, to pay the debt he owes her. With what infinite reluctance did she receive it!—Proudest of men, she called him: and said she would never more intrude herself as our guest: she saw plainly he hated her, since he would not accept of her friendship. He had some  
difficulty

difficulty to pacify her; but she vows revenge.

Adieu, my dearest cousin; I see her coming across the fields.—What a fine figure! what dignity in her air! Pity that she will not make some deserving man happy. Do you know, I have been thinking of a scheme of that nature, in favour of your poor Mr. Eveling. Shall I pursue it? It is feasible.—But she is here.

Once more your's,

LOUISA SIDLEY.

LETTER

## LETTER VI.

LADY SCUDAMORE TO MRS. SIDLEY.

**I** Have no patience with that Lady Bell.— But you are imprudent. What occasion have you to be for ever fidgeting after your bantling, and so often leave them by themselves? Do you not know, that a handsome young female, in the country, has a thousand times more power than in town? for there, every object is calculated to awaken and cherish that sort of indolent serenity which is so favourable to *la belle passion*. I speak this from experience. A bustle, a crowd is our best security. Amidst all the handsome fellows in London, at public assemblies, I scarce ever felt the slightest emotion. The variety, the agitation of one's spirits, chattering to half a hundred different people; the desire of being distinguished, of exciting admiration, left no leisure to think of love; Eveling himself was forgot; but now, the very sound of his name softens me to more than infant tenderness.

I can



I can no way account for the number of divorces and elopements which every winter produces—they seem to contradict my sentiments as to the danger of the dear town—but by attributing them to the universal rage of gaming.—A lady first loses her money. Debts of honour must be paid;—she tries every resource;—dares no longer apply to her husband;—what is to be done? A male friend offers to extricate her from the difficulty. The last creditor is worse than all the former. How is he to be paid? But one stake left! So from one thing to another:—the consequence is plain. But as to love, it is a prostitution of the word to use it on such occasions.

Such delectable marriages as mine, too, are most happily calculated to provide amusement for Doctors Commons. To tell you the truth, I am most heartily sick of my husband, myself, and of every thing about me. He is peevish, covetous, and jealous *comme le diable*. I am restless, dissatisfied, cross, and dying with spleen and vapours. The animals about me are stupid, ignorant, blundering

blundering rustics.—O *Ciel*! I would not for worlds that Eveling were here while I am in this humour; I swear I could not answer for the consequence.

Seriously, my dear, I am in a very disagreeable situation. You can have no idea. Sir Benjamin now loves nothing on earth but the unrighteous mammon; and for that he carries his dorage to such excess, that I could almost as easily wrench out his only remaining tooth, as extract a single guinea from his purse. I stand a chance of starving in the midst of plenty. The old soul has absolutely no one single virtue in his whole composition.—Too late I find this. Positively, I have paid far too dear for the honour of being a nurse. Had I listened to your advice, or rather, to the soft pleadings of my own heart:—but there was a fate in it. And if I should hereafter, in consequence of my false step, be tempted to go astray, I shall offer no other defence than the above.

Their stars are more in fault than they.

Adieu. I have time for no more.

CLARA SCUDAMORE.

LETTER,

## L E T T E R VII.

MR. SUMMERS TO MR. SIDLEY.

**S**IDLEY, where have you hid yourself this age? I have had the utmost difficulty to trace you out.—So easily disgusted with the world!—a few months trial—no such thing as true friendship! Eh, is it not so?

My poor Sidley, it is the very manner in which I railed myself, on my late misfortune. So because I chose to be extravagant, and to live above my income, I was to accuse the world of ingratitude, for not extricating me from my difficulties. I blush at my folly.—You and I, Sidley, only received the reward of our own imprudence: we were forced to disappear, and we were offended because our absence did not produce a general mourning. Very reasonable!—Think justly of yourself as well as of the world: let us expect no more than we merit: a thousand insignificant beings, such as you and I, might sink into nothing, without being missed one moment by the busy sons of pleasure, though we might excite a sigh in the bosom of a friend. I, for example,  
have

have never ceased to remember Sidley with affection ; but the confusion of my own affairs, the necessity of my precipitate journey, and the various scenes I was engaged in while abroad, must plead an excuse for my silence. Indeed I have not for this age known where to direct to you.—Let the past be forgot ; I am again returned to dear England ; my finances in tolerable order, and such a stock of prudence acquired by experience, that I hope I am in no danger of taking a second trip.

And now tell me, what have you been doing ? I have heard strange stories, but I want faith.—Lady Bell, for example. That she had a *tendresse*, her eyes told all the world ; and that she has too much fire in her composition to be wholly guided by the unimpassioned rules of female decorum, I also can tell ; but then she had pride, which, they say, saves man and woman too from falling. However, innocent or guilty, Scandal has got hold of her fame, and is making pretty free with it. Jack Beville alone wants faith, nor will believe one syllable of the matter. To him she is all fair and spotless ; nay, he swears he will cut the throat of any  
one

one who dares but think her capable of frailty. You know he deals in the superlative. He is just returned from abroad, as madly in love as ever. I would have you be upon your guard: he has dropt some hints; has been enquiring what part of the country you are in, &c.

They tell me, Lady Bell is actually on a visit to you, or to your wife. Man and wife are one, so it is the same thing, you know.— But come, you have all had enough of rural felicity, so hasten to town *en famille*, where none will be more glad to welcome you than

Your sincere friend, &c.

SUMMERS.

LETTER



## LETTER VIII.

MR. SIDLEY TO MR. SUMMERS.

YOU say true, my dear Summers; it is our own pride which creates half the insults we complain of; but yet I had some reason to be disgusted with the treatment I met with: you, however, were too far distant to be applied to. How you would have acted, even you, till actually put to the proof, cannot tell; but as I have ever felt a real pleasure from believing you my friend, I am willing still to cherish the fond idea, should it even be a delusion. Young and romantic minds are apt to expect too much from that attachment. An agreeable companion of similar sentiments, who may be trusted with a free effusion of the heart, and who will be equally unreserved; one who will not injure you, nay, who, on the contrary, will promote your interest, while it is not incompatible with his own, is as much as one ought to desire in what is called a friend, and perhaps more than one has reason to expect.

I would gladly obey your summons, were I what I have been; but, alas! perverse fortune

tune is still my foe:—but, if the world is to believed, I am,

Though Fortune frowns,  
Victorious in Love's fight.

Upon my word, I am not a little indebted to madam Fame, for honouring so insignificant a being as me with so enviable a conquest.—And does our friend Sir John, the knight-errant, threaten?—Well, we must take heed to ourselves: I know he is a perfect Othello for jealousy, though, in other respects, a very worthy fellow. As to the lady, she is a charming creature.—Women, Summers, are fascinating creatures; they grow upon one insensibly, in spite of one's better judgment. Does a wife do so? I answer by a shake of my head, and a sigh of self-reproach. My Louisa is an angel—as beautiful, and as good; but for us poor imperfect mortals, less angelic beings sometimes do as well.

Adieu.—I am much pleased with the renewal of our correspondence; for though my judgment of men and manners is a little rectified, yet I shall ever retain a warm regard for him who first taught my breast to glow with friendship's celestial fire.—Ah!

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how sweet are first impressions, before the heart has acquired that prudential reserve so necessary in the world! How delightful the first sensation of love! were it to last, 'twere too much bliss for mortals. Never can it be recalled: and never though I feel but too much inclination to rove, shall I again taste that exquisite delight which I experienced, when my Louisa first blessed me with her love. The dear novelty is gone; and every other attachment must now be, comparatively, as insipid as a twice-told tale.

Once more, adieu; and believe me

Your's,

SIDLEY.

LETTER

## L E T T E R IX.

MR. SUMMERS TO MR. SIDLEY.

UPON my word!—And is friendship so very much below par in your esteem? You do that noble sentiment no small injustice; and no less injustice do you do your Summers, in treating me with such reserve.—But I know the mighty secret; her Ladyship's imprudence has published it to all the world: the actions of a person of her rank and fortune are not so easily concealed. She made a distinguished figure in the *beau monde*; she suddenly disappeared. All the world asked, "Where is the gay Lady Bell?" "At Belmont." "And what is she doing there?" "Conferring acts of friendship on the wife, and receiving payment in full of all demands of the husband." This was the report of Fanny Meadows, her rival in Sir John Beville's good graces, or rather, aspiring to that felicity.

She has, it seems, been lately somewhere in your neighbourhood. The country, Sidley, is the very worst place on earth for little affairs of gallantry; for there an eternal

gossiping goes round; and if a woman there had nobody to communicate dear scandal to, she would whisper it to the reeds. It is in this delightful town only where true freedom reigns, where one may be lost in a crowd, and where, at convenient *coteries* and midnight masquerades, one may say and do whatever one has a fancy to with impunity.

And so you begin to find that you married in haste, that you might repent at leisure. Your wife is too much in the angelic style for you. Why really I believe, your very, very good kind of women are less formed to secure our volatile hearts, than the gay, capricious, self-willed dear creatures, who know how to make a man look about him. It is for that reason, perhaps, that I am inclined to attach myself to a fair neighbour of your's, your friend's friend, Miss West; who, since her father's death, has, I am told, taken up her residence at Claremont.—I know not whether you have yet seen her. She is reckoned extremely handsome; and what is still better, when matrimony is in the case, I know she is extremely rich. I mean ere long to pay her a visit.—She has given me some reason to believe, that I shall not sue in vain for her  
good



good graces; but as she is a coquette, I do not make myself too secure of success: no matter, it is worth a trial. I shall see you too, my friend, which will be a great inducement to make the trip; your fair Bella also, whom I no less long to see; for it must be owned, her ladyship has her attractions. I shall then be able to judge how matters go on, though you are so prudently secret: there is no cause for that, since scandal is gone forth, and not the wings of the morning can overtake or stop its flight.

Adieu. — Believe me, on the word of a man of honour, I am most sincerely interested in your happiness; and if in any thing I can serve you, command to the utmost

Your friend,

SUMMERS.

## LETTER X.

LADY SCUDAMORE TO MRS. SIDLEY.

O Heavens, cousin! what do you think?—  
 (I am out of breath at the news.)—  
 They tell me Eveling is returned; actually  
 come to England!—That is not the worst  
 (what a fool of a heart is mine, to palpitate  
 at this rate): they say the imprudent wretch  
 is absolutely in our neighbourhood, at a farm-  
 house. The creature has imbibed French  
 notions of gallantry, I suppose, and perhaps  
 comes here in that silly way, in hopes of  
 teaching me the graces; but, I hope, he will  
 find me too much rusticated. In dear Lon-  
 don indeed, where one has so many lauda-  
 ble examples, he might stand some chance;  
 but here, where one lives temperately, so-  
 berly, and righteously——; and yet I would  
 not wish to meet the fellow amidst those leafy  
 shades.—If Sir Benjamin should hear of his  
 arrival, and in so strange a way!—What can  
 he mean? it will create a thousand suspi-  
 cions.

The carriage at the gate, say you, Susan?  
 —your master waiting for me? — time for  
 church?

church?—How little is my mind—I come.—  
Adieu, dear cousin; I will resume my pen  
when I return.—O that you were here! you  
who are so wise, prudent, and all that.

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## IN CONTINUATION.

LOUISA, I foresee a thousand ill consequences.—O guard me from myself! I now feel, too late, the danger of marrying a man one can neither love nor esteem.—Grandeur may for a while dazzle, and gaiety amuse; but there is an aching void in the heart, which love alone can fill.—I am sick of every thing around me.

Whatever different aims mankind pursue.  
O Happiness! still thee we keep in view.

But your Clara, alas! has mistaken the road.  
I never knew the extent of my wretchedness  
till now.

I have seen this dangerous man; and one  
fatal glance from him has cast a dark gloomy  
shade over all my former enjoyments.

C 4

Riches,

Riches, what can you now bestow, to console me for the sacrifice I have made to thee? —When we came out of church, Sir Benjamin stopped to speak with some of his acquaintance; I, in no humour for insignificant chat, went forward to the coach: just as I reached it, who should present himself but the dreaded man? I started back.—He bowed, with an air of dejection, at the same time putting his spread hand on his breast, with such a look! I hurried into the carriage, too much affected. He is much altered: pale, thin, and oppressed with visible melancholy. —Poor Eveling! I have, in every sense, been the cause of his ruin. The thought is too much for my peace! —Sir Benjamin torments me: his fondness is detestable, worse, if possible, than his peevish ill-humour. —I have no patience!

——How hard my fate,  
To pass life's scenes with such a mate!

Adieu.—What would you advise me? If Eveling continues in this neighbourhood, I am undone. I will write to him. If he has any regard for my peace, he will, by his absence,

absence, put it in my power to act as becomes

Your friend,

CLARA SCUDAMORE.

If he stays, what mortal woman can answer for the consequence?



## LETTER XI.

LADY SCUDAMORE TO MRS. SIDLEY.

DO you know, my dear, Sir Benjamin and I have had a very serious matrimonial *fracas*.—The creature, to be jealous without the least shadow of a cause! it would almost tempt one ——— only that it is taking a too severe revenge on one's self.

He intercepted a letter from Eveling, wherein he talks with lover-like soft nonsense of our meeting, — of his misery, — his unconquerable passion, and so forth.——The knight trembled with rage, and the palsy, while he presented to me the unfortunate *billet-doux*. I took it with great composure. Conscious innocence made me saucy. He stormed. I was too proud to condescend to make a defence. I only said, "I have seen your nephew, Sir, by chance; and had I chose to see him on purpose, I should not have thought it necessary to ask your leave. I am the guardian of my own honour, and never before did any one dare to call it in question." I spoke with dignity; for in reality, I had nothing to reproach myself with. He seemed struck with my manner.—Guilt renders

renders people cowards; innocence is bold as a lion.

After a pause,—“What, Madam!” said he, in a milder accent, “would you pretend to make light of an affair like this: to encourage the guilty passion of such a libertine?” “What proof have you, Sir, that I encourage it? Do you suppose I am to be answerable for every silly fellow’s passion that my charms may excite? I have the vanity to think, in that case, I should have much to——” He interrupted me with, “I have no doubt of your vanity, Madam; and as little doubt have I of my having been guilty of a most unpardonable weakness, in forming such an unequal alliance”—[He sighed.] —“but patience, Madam, you will soon be released.”—[This speech affected me, for he has lately been in a very bad state of health.] —“I wish not for the event you hint at, Sir; that would be of little consequence now; and I sighed in my turn: ‘but I do wish, that since what is past cannot be recalled, you would not make my situation still more wretched, by unjust suspicions. I am no hypocrite; and if I could acquire courage sufficient to act contrary to the deep-rooted principles of virtue which were early instilled into

into me, I should soon arrive at the modish boldness of exhibiting the character of a modern wife.'

"I may have injured you, Clara," said he, taking my hand; "you have been a better wife than I perhaps deserved: better than I had reason to expect, I am sure you are; but nevertheless, that billet has given a deep wound to my peace. Happy had it been for us both, had I never endeavoured to separate——" [He paused, visibly affected] "Even my death cannot repair the wrong; and I fear my fortune will little compensate."

The tear started into my eye: I pressed his hand. 'This kindness, Sir, I cannot withstand: rage hardens me, but by generous treatment you may mould me as you please. Believe me, my meeting with Mr. Eveling was accidental, and only for a few moments; but if it will be any satisfaction to you, I promise never voluntarily to see him more, except you will give me leave to do it in your presence. I should be happy to see you reconciled; happy if you would  
take

take compassion on the unfortunate youth, whose circumstances are extremely distressing. I am, in some measure, the cause. Till you knew me, he had ever found a father in you: since that time, he has been in a manner deserted, and left to his own imprudence; which I do not pretend to justify: but as I have been a bar to his fortune, I think it but justice to plead for him.'

"I feel," said he, "that I have not long to live,—He has some reason to complain of my unkindness, though that is no excuse for his follies. I will see him, Madam, before I die. You will neither of you have reason to be displeased at my will." He then desired me to leave him, as he found himself extremely ill.

I must now bid you adieu, that I may attend him. If he should really be in such danger as he apprehends, I shall begin to call myself to an account for some part of my conduct, though I have nothing criminal to reproach myself with. Sometimes a little too haughty and self-willed; but in such a situation, who could help being dissatisfied?  
—I ought

—I ought not to have married him—so you told me from the first.—Ah! it is too late for these reflections.

Adieu,

CLARA SCUDAMORE.

LETTER



## LETTER XII.

MRS. SIDLEY TO LADY SCUDAMORE.

I Pity you, my dear; but at present I have not leisure to enlarge on the subject: only remember, that Mr. Eveling can now be nothing to you. Beware even of a too tender friendship! promote his interest with Sir Benjamin as much as you please, but avoid *tête-à-têtes*, recollections of past scenes, &c. Do not even dissuade him from his proposed American scheme; absence is best for you both.

I wish, when you have effected a reconciliation between him and his uncle, you would send him here, out of harm's way, till he goes abroad: Sidley would be pleased with such a companion, and Lady Bell would be no less pleased to have another beau to enliven her parties.—Why, has she any of these animals in the country? you will ask. What do you think of my Sidley for one? Not much in the beau way, to do him justice; but yet a very different being from what he was when you last saw him. No longer negligent in his dress: all his former gaiety

gaiety is returned :---but your Louisa is still the same ; sighing for those serene joys which our too-dissipated friend has interrupted ; fond only of retirement and domestic bliss. ---Ah ! why has her presence so changed the placid scene ?

I am vexed. Her friend, a Miss West, has a seat in this neighbourhood : a lady who has now a large independent fortune, like herself, and, by all accounts, who is still more gay than her ladyship. They are going to have a masquerade. I strenuously opposed being of the party ; but as my husband had consented, I recollected your advice, and therefore yielded a reluctant consent. I find Summers is to be there. They tell me, he is an humble servant of the beforementioned Miss West. Nothing is talked of but this vile ball. Lady Bell is to choose my fancy-dress for the occasion. Ah ! I care not what it is : her's will be superb.--- I have no patience.

Is Sir Benjamin really so ill ! Take care, my dear cousin ; leave yourself no cause for self-reproach : it is a painful sensation, and will embitter all your future days.---Adieu.

Write

Write to me.---Settle Eveling's affairs as soon as possible, and dismiss him. Here, for your sake as well as his own, he shall be sincerely welcomed by

Your's,

LOUISA SIDLEY.

LETTER

## LETTER XIII.

LADY SCUDAMORE TO MRS. SIDLEY.

**A** Masquerade! How I should enjoy being of the party!--Positively, cousin, you are too grave at your age, to be an enemy to innocent amusements.

Sir Benjamin is better, cheered by my condescending smiles. No chance yet of being a rich young widow; which, by the bye, I look upon to be one of the most joyous states in life.—I am a docile, good creature; and for fear of those said self-reproaches, &c. have followed your sage advice, and been so kind to the old soul (cry him mercy) that he seems to have renewed his age. In return for which, he has granted my request; is reconciled to poor Eveling; and here we are *en famille*.—You start, sweet prude that you are. (No offence—prudery is only the quintessence of prudence.) It is certain, that the creature is at this moment under the same roof, nay, in the very next room; and, while I write, suffering his delighted uncle to win from him a game at chess:—to the good soul the highest triumph. He has, within these few days,

so

so stolen into his good graces, that I do not think we could exist without him.—What does he imagine must be my sensations, when he can thus even warm the cold bosom of age? He was a favourite from childhood; and never was that affection diminished, till love, the disturber of high and of low, made Sir Benjamin overleap the bounds of reason : *la belle passion* has had its day; and, now we are restored to our former senses, we return to our former attachments.

I own I am charmed with this addition to our society.—You may shake your wise head; but, if I know myself, it is an innocent pleasure. Without having been guilty of Eloisa's former imprudence, I will study to acquit myself like another Mrs. Wolmore.

Charming!—I have been in a kind of stupid doze for this age past; but now,—passions to combat, conduct to regulate, a lover to keep at a proper distance, and an old husband to keep from jealousy!—I wake, I feel my existence, and yet have no fear of the consequence; for I do not see how I could, were I at liberty to choose, augment my felicity.



licity. I see, I converse, I behold myself silently adored, and I pride myself on that dignity of carriage which imposes that silence. My happiness depends on my self-esteem: I prefer Eveling to all the men in the world as a lover; but from a lover to a husband the falling-off is so great, that I am convinced I should be a great loser, were it in my power to convert him into one. But it is pleasant, to have so pretty a fellow at one's command from morning to night, and to see him cold and insensible to the charms of every other woman, while his eyes beam respectful tenderness whenever they raise their timid glances towards me.

Sir Benjamin, somehow or other, seems to have a wonderful confidence in me of late. He shall not be deceived. I speak this last sentence aloud with firmness. — The pride of human nature loves to combat with difficulties.

Adieu; for I am summoned.—Write, and love me.

CLARA SCUDAMORE.

LETTER

## L E T T E R   X I V .

MRS. SIDLEY TO LADY SCUDAMORE.

**S**TART! yes indeed, I start at the wonderful contents of your last letter.— Surely Sir Benjamin is exceedingly imprudent. And you, my cousin, who have said so many prudent things in regard to Lady Bell's conduct, do you fancy yourself exempt from the weakness of our sex? Like a silly moth, you will flutter round the taper, till ——— Ah! forbid it Heaven! But indeed I tremble for you. A man who, you say (is it proper for a married woman to say it?) adores you, to live under the same roof; to be at your command from morning to night; and to dart at you his impassioned glances! —Eloisa is a romance: but in real life, are passions so easily combated? or is it so very pleasant to live in a constant struggle between a criminal passion and one's duty? I thought you had more knowledge of human nature. In such a situation as your's, cowardice is a virtue.

I have an instance daily before my eyes; fatal instance, I fear, she will one day prove: but fate in that must take its course; patience

tience is my province, silent patience: but in regard to you, friend of my heart, not to speak would be criminal:—as you have hitherto paid a kind attention to my advice, follow it now.

Our vile masquerade, owing to Miss West's having been indisposed, has not yet taken place. Eveling would perhaps like the amusement, by way of a little variety. Oblige me; for your own sake, send him to us; I will take care of him; and as he will leave his heart in safe custody, there can be no danger: and yet, chide if you please, I would give half my noble income to see him firmly attached to a certain dangerous fair one. Ah! it would put all our affairs *en train*.—At all events, send him, and you will be more than a Mrs. Wolmore; consequently, still more worthy than you have ever been of the esteem of

Your affectionate,

LOUISA SIDLEY.

LETTER

## L E T T E R X V.

LADY SCUDAMORE TO MRS. SIDLEY.

“**A**T any rate send him.”—Upon my word! And are passions then so easily combated? Your own words, remember. You wish, too, that he were firmly attached to a certain dangerous fair one.—I am much obliged to you, truly: but we do not so easily part with our captives, especially to her ladyship. She has already, I fear, gained one more than comes to her share. Seriously, I know no one thing in life that would more deeply wound my peace, than the loss of Eveling’s heart. This may be improper for some married women to say, but there is great allowance to be made for my situation. Remember, I ask nothing but his heart; and if he has some little interest in mine, I see not any violent crime in it. Sir Benjamin is not capable of those refined distinctions which Sidley and you would experience, If I do not injure his honour; if I am obliging and obedient to his will and pleasure, what more can he ask? He has  
not,

not, I dare say, the conscience to expect me to love him; and why should he be like the dog in the fable? My passion, I protest to you, is perfectly Platonic, and, if I know myself, will ever remain so. I have often said, I was not formed to be the slave of the blind God. A gentle lambent flame, a pleasing warmth, much friendship, and no small quantity of vanity. It would hurt me beyond measure, to find my charms too weak to retain the only slave I now suffer to wear my chains:—but I think I may trust him.

Lady Bell, indeed! I should not have thought of her becoming my rival!

I have told Eveling you expect, as my friend, the compliment of a visit from him, and it was my will and pleasure that your expectations should be gratified. He looked at me with so much meaning in his eyes, while I made this proposal, that I felt my colour change.—This comes of your violent prudence. Had he not reason to think I found his presence dangerous, since I was in such haste to get rid of him?—I soon recovered myself, however; and, to punish his vanity, have treated him with gay indifference



ference ever since. You will see him then, my cousin; and you will be compelled to acknowledge, that he is but too amiable. Take care of him, for my sake. — Let me know what he thinks of your *belles*.

Adieu,

CLARA SCUDAMORE.

## LETTER XVI.

MRS. SIDLEY TO LADY SCUDAMORE.

**Y**ES, my dear, he is extremely amiable. Sidley is charmed with his conversation, and our ladies no less so with his person:—Miss West in particular.

To her I have at last been introduced; but, in spite of Lady Bell's endeavours to prejudice me in her favour, she is not at all to my taste. Haughty, affected, and vain to excess. I must own, however, that she is remarkably handsome, though not in the style of beauty which I admire; and yet her features are perfectly regular; but she distorts them by affectation:—a studied smile, to display her white teeth; fine eyes half-closed, by way of languishment. Perhaps I like her the less for the negligence with which she treats me.—My fortune is, to be sure, far inferior to her's, and she has a passion for people of fashion and quality. You may suppose, that I neither am, nor could take the trouble of being on any degree of intimacy with her. I meet her, indeed, oftener than I wish, at Lady Bell's; and now  
since

since Mr. Eveling has been our guest, she condescends to make more frequent visits to our cottage.

Mr. Summers is daily expected.—By the accounts I have heard of that gentleman, I fear he may find your friend a dangerous rival. You start!—A rival in the lady's favour, I mean; which, however, to console you, he does not seem very solicitous to gain: and yet, my dear, were she worthy of him, you ought to rejoice at his forming a new and more fortunate attachment.—You will chide; but I would have my Clara not only act with innocence, but propriety.

The foolish masquerade is still deferred till Summers arrives. I feel myself of so little consequence amongst those people who fancy themselves great and mighty, that I have scarce patience to associate with them. My Sidley, on the contrary, seems but too much pleased with those gay insignificant beings, and pays more deference to rank, than I think consistent with his good sense: it is a mean pride, of which I thought him incapable: it is the weakness of upstarts; and he is as well-born, and had once as flattering prospects as the best of them. I re-

member you once said of him, "He is, I fear, virtuous more from the absence of temptation, than from any fixed principle—wanting," you added, "that inflexible steadiness, which alone is sufficient to stem the torrent of passions naturally impetuous, and too eager in the pursuit of pleasure." I remember, too, I was rather hurt at your having formed, what I thought, so unjust an opinion of him.—Ah, alas! was it unjust?

We are launching into expences; of which, I fear, we shall soon experience the fatal consequences. He will not suffer me to remonstrate. Alas! my dear, he treats me with a degree of negligence that wounds me to the heart. No doubt, he makes comparisons, much to my disadvantage, between me and our fine ladies; the unaffected simplicity of my manners, and plainness of my dress, is such a contrast to theirs. But my pride differs from his: I scorn to attempt an appearance above my humble situation. Then my natural gravity is now converted into the deepest dejection. I cannot help it:—is it in nature I should be chearful? He wonders what is the matter with me. "Never was any creature so much altered:—  
but



but women, after they are married, think it unnecessary to sacrifice to the Graces." This he said to me this morning, with a peevish accent. Tears started into my eyes. He looked displeased. "You have, I suppose, been told, Louisa, that beauty appears to most advantage in tears; but I am quite of a different opinion. Venus is described as the laughter-loving goddess. Be assured, you would much better become the latter than the former.—That cap, too, gives such a primitive air to your countenance." "It is neat, Sir, and that is my principal study; but if you dislike it, it is easily changed." "O, as you please, Madam," cried he, carelessly; "only, I believe, few women, if they had such fine hair as you, would choose to conceal it." "If I thought it would appear more agreeable to you, my Sidley, I should have a laudable pride in displaying it; but lately," added I, sighing, "I have not flattered myself that any of my few charms have been honoured with much of your attention." "Why, Louisa, charms that one is much accustomed to, cannot be supposed to excite any violent emotions; but one would wish one's wife to make a tolerable figure in the eyes of others, were it only to justify one's taste."



While he spoke, in came our belles, handsome as the most elegantly-fancied undresses could render them; their fine complexions heightened by their morning ramble. He flew to Lady Bell. Maria displayed all her airs and graces on the entrance of your Eveling; who received her modish advances with proper gallantry, while I felt myself a mere cypher amidst the gay circle.—Ah, my dear, it is too plain, Sidley no longer loves me! I retired unnoticed, to weep over my child.—Sweet innocent, why have I introduced thee into this miserable world?

Adieu, my cousin. Why should I say more? it is only distressing the sympathizing heart of my Clara.

LETTER

## LETTER XVII.

MRS. SIDLEY TO LADY SCUDAMORE.

**M**R. Summers arrived here last night. The meeting between him and Sidley was affecting.—Attachments formed in youth are not easily effaced. Indeed, I find it was more from want of ability than negligence, that he appeared to desert his friend in his distress.

He related, with some humour, the very embarrassing situation into which he had plunged himself by his extravagance, with his precipitate retreat to France. “But all is right now again, Charles,” cried he.—“You and I have paid somewhat dear for our experience; it is, however, a valuable commodity; and, as most men play the fool some time or other of their lives, the sooner it is over the better: youth is the best excuse for it. I now,” added he, “want only such a wife (if such another,” he was pleased to say, “is to be found) as your’s, to keep me steady in the way I should go. Have you no sister,” continued he, with a gay air, addressing himself to me, “that would ac-

D 4

cept

cept of a heart which is impatient to dispose of itself, as it is, I feel at this moment, far from being safe in my custody?"—"What think you of Lady Bell, your old friend?" cried Sidley, smiling, and looking at me; "Louisa, I am sure will give her a warm recommendation, as her ladyship is one of her first favourites." "I am, indeed," said I, "her great admirer; nor do I know a young lady more amiable, both in person and mind." Summers looked a little arch, and answered drily, "That may be your opinion, Madam; but I could at this moment produce one a thousand times more charming in person, in mind, in every thing."—"Perhaps you mean her friend, Miss West," cried I. "Maria is a fine girl, to be sure," said he; "but it is not at Fir-hill that she must hope to shine, where there are beauties so much more attractive.—Do not be jealous, Charles,—I feel I shall absolutely be in love ———." He stopped short, affecting to be rebuked by a look I gave him, expressive of my dislike to such silly, frothy compliments.

"Charles,"

"Charles," cried he, "does Mrs. Sidley know any thing of my character? Did you ever tell her what a thoughtless fellow I am? But I hope, in such society as her's, to acquire a little polish." 'I hope not,' returned Sidley, in the same gay tone, 'if you mean in the Chesterfield way.' "I am very little qualified to polish in any way," said I; "and I dare answer for it, Mr. Summers does not think he stands in need of any, after having studied (as one may discover by his conversation he has) that master of the Graces." 'And how, Madam, do you discover that?' resumed he. "By your following his advice, Sir; by your visible contempt of our sex, by flattering so very —" 'O, Madam, spare me,' interrupted he; 'the more I hear, the more I shall be tempted to offend.'

But why, Clara, do I repeat such insignificant chat? Do you call this Summers an agreeable man? I do not half like him: he is a confident flatterer, and has a manner which I cannot describe. But I am too much ruf-

ticated, to have any taste for your modern fine gentlemen.

Adieu.

Ever your's,

LOUISA SIDLEY.

R. S. The silly masquerade is fixed for next Monday.

LETTER



## L E T T E R XVIII.

MRS. SIDLEY TO LADY SCUDAMORE.

OUR long-talked-of ball is at last over, and I am returned to my peaceful cottage, sufficiently fatigued with the uninteresting bustle; where all but your poor Louisa were gay and joyous.—We only can taste when the heart is at ease; and mine was sad, as sad could be.—Must I say something of our dresses? I suppose you will expect it.—Heigh-ho!

Lady Bell was elegant as the best-fancied ornaments could make her. A quantity of silver-gauze, a profusion of Italian flowers and jewels, added lustre to her native charms: her delicate shape displayed to advantage, and her bosom, white as snow, exposed without those prudish coverings which you and I might deem necessary.—Sidley could not conceal the admiration she excited: his eyes wandered, with visible delight, from charm to charm. I, that I might escape notice, since no longer worthy of his, chose a black domino; in which I looked  
neither

neither well nor ill: it was of no consequence.

Nothing could be more elegant than the decorations of our ball-room: a pleasant wood, too, near the house, was illuminated, and the trees hung with garlands of flowers. In the temple and summer-houses there were cold collations of every thing that could gratify the Epicurean taste. Music was also placed so as to be heard without seeing the performers. Some of the company amused themselves with dancing, while others strolled in the gardens:—a silly set of souls they appeared to me,—with “I know you, and you don’t know me:” and a fruitless attempt at wit.

Summers was quite troublesome to me. Miss West, of course, expected him to be her partner; but he complained of a sprained ankle, silly fellow! that he might keep himself disengaged, to pester me with his unmeaning nonsense. Eveling, who seems to be quite as acceptable, supplied his place with that fair one; and fair she really was, adorned too for conquest. Sidley, though charmed with his partner, appeared more than usually attentive to my motions:—so  
far

far Summer's gallantry was of advantage to me. Were you in my place, perhaps you would play off a few coquettish airs, by way of recalling the wanderer; but I have no turn for that; nor do I approve of doing ill (or at least putting on the appearance of ill) that good may come of it.

I had much more to say, my dear, but I am interrupted.——Adieu for the present.

LOUISA SIDLEY,

LETTER

## LETTER XIX.

MISS MARIA WEST TO MISS GORE.

**Y**OU was a cross creature, Kitty, not to come with me. We have a thousand amusements, though in the country; and such beaux! it would do your heart good to see them. There is Sidley,

Who has that soft persuasive art  
Which steals insensibly the coldest heart.

Lady Bell has long been a lost woman: seriously, she seems inclined to carry matters a little farther than is quite the thing;—but that is her affair: I am no prude, though I hold it safest to be virtuous,—if one can.—Summers is here too; but he is a mere animal. Would you believe it? the creature has piqued my pride; but you know I never set much value on such an insignificant conquest.—Like a modish friend, he has taken a fancy to Sidley's help-mate.—Such a bit of still-life!—Ah! how could she hope to retain the heart of a husband like her's, a fellow

fellow of fire and spirit; she such a composition of milk and water? And shall she, with impunity, rob me of my captive? No. I love a little mischief, were it only by way of variety: Lady Bell will, I dare say, assist me in it. She has long affected to be her friend; nay, I believe, once seriously believed herself such; but her present connection with Sidley renders that now impossible:—she must hate her, because she has injured her; and they never pardon who have done the wrong. I am much mistaken, if Sidley does not still like his wife well enough, in spite of his new attachment, to be horribly vexed, were he to suspect that she gave any other man the preference, besides the proper bustle that a fellow of his spirit must make about his honour, and all that. To tell you the truth, I have a most cordial aversion to her. She has the vanity to think herself handsome; and to be sure, if a set of unmeaning features and rustic bloom—— To me she is horrid. Indeed, I cannot conceive how the men can think a person in her style of life worth their least attention. Women of fashion have such advantages: she, an obscure little creature,



creature, whom nobody knows! But I always thought Summers a silly fellow.

There is one Eveling here, worth a thousand of him as a lover; but I fear he has not the requisite qualifications for that commodious thing a husband; and I am too fond of making a proper figure in life, to consult my heart in affairs of that nature. In the way of matrimony, I should certainly give Summers the preference; and as one marries now-a-days in order to enjoy one's liberty, I would as soon have taken him as any other man, whose fortune was not superior: and really, the sooner that affair is dispatched the better, since one meets with a thousand temptations which it is not safe to yield to, without that convenient cloak—a Husband.

I look upon a divorce to be the most joyous thing in nature: it makes a woman known, and spreads the fame of her attractions; besides, it is the *ton*.—Lady Bell was excessively to blame, not to take Beville: she might then have pleased herself without censure; but now, if her affair is discovered, she

she is ruined :—but she affected the woman of sentiment, and thought herself superior to the weakness of her sex. She is justly punished.—I hate your women who pique themselves on their understanding. Who, now-a-days, cares a fig for a woman's mind? Riches for a wife, and beauty in a mistress, is all that the fellows have the conscience to desire. Who would choose to be a fool to their wife? As they do not trouble themselves about their own understandings, they would be very sorry to be troubled with her's. Wisdom is a grave, antiquated virtue. What a silly figure would a wise man make amidst our modish circles! I have now and then met with one of those sage beings; and I never saw them half an hour in a room without affecting the whole assembly with the vapours. For my part, I yawn at the bare idea of sense, sentiment, and such stuff.

I want to make Sidley jealous of his wife : if we could bring her to give him some just foundation for it, it would be still better; but I fear she has not sufficient spirit for that : however, the appearance, properly managed, will answer our purpose. I found means to give him a few hints at the masquerade; for I was quite in the humour for  
a little

a little mischief. I made him look about him; and I believe his suspicions put him also in a humour for a little mischief by way of revenge. It is certain, his fair one and he, by way of avoiding the crowd I suppose, made a pretty long visit to my little hermitage:—as convenient a retreat for lovers as could be wished. I thought her ladyship appeared rather disconcerted when I rallied her on her long absence. Even Sidley had a sort of awkwardness about him on their return, and did not acquit himself with his usual gaiety. I told him, that though Eveling and I had missed our friends, I had the pleasure to inform him, that Summers had taken all imaginable care of his help-mate; who did not in the least appear to regret his absence. This speech was not calculated to raise his spirits.

Lady Bell, before we sat down to supper, complained of indisposition: I offered an apartment for the rest of the night in my house, but she chose to go home. Mrs. Sidley, who also complained of fatigue, begged she might accompany her. This she declined, saying, that she was sure it was only out of complaisance to her. A seemingly friendly contest ensued: Sidley interposed; whispered

whispered his deary, that it would be rude to leave the company under such a trifling pretence as a little fatigue; and said he would take care of her ladyship, and return to her before the company rose from table: then taking his fair partner by the hand, he led her off in triumph. Summers looked arch, and begged she would not be uneasy about her friend, for there was no doubt but Mr. Sidley would pay her proper attention. In saying this, he shewed his white teeth, by a malicious grin. Eveling, who is a good creature, looked with tender compassion at Louisa, who, soft soul, was obliged to have recourse to her smelling-bottle.

Sidley returned much sooner than I expected: he found Summers seated by his help-mate, whispering soft nonsense in her ear: to which, however, it must be owned, she did not seem to pay much attention. Her eyes were every moment directed towards the door with anxious looks; and when her good man approached, her before-unanimated countenance brightened up: she made room for him; but he, with a sullen air, pranced round to the other side of the table.

Man,

Man, that lawless libertine, may rove  
Free and uncensured thro' the wilds of love ;

but our poor sex, fettered by those unnatural restraints they have imposed on us, are——

I am interrupted, my dear : Eveling is below : the sound of his name has quite disconcerted my ideas. Adieu then. My letter before was of a sufficient length.

Your's,

MARIA WEST.

LETTER



## LETTER XX.

LADY SCUDAMORE TO MRS. SIDLEY.

O My dear, Sir Benjamin is dreadfully ill! The physicians shake their heads.—Poor man!—How I now rejoice that I have nothing criminal to reproach myself with.—To be a witness of his sufferings, and to reflect that I must one day be reduced to the same situation, when the King of Terrors claims me as his captive, the world, and all its pomps and vanities, lose their attractions.

Send Eveling back; his uncle desires to see him ere he dies; and your friend, in her present frame of mind, may see him too with perfect safety.—Alas! this awful event cannot remove the bar that is placed between us.

We

We are separated for ever.—I am sufficiently punished for my ambition.

Your affairs, my cousin, are, I find, far from being *entrain*; but yet beware of causeless jealousy. I was the first to set you on your guard against Lady Bell, but I shall be the last to encourage you in that tormenting passion. She has hitherto acted in a manner to deserve our esteem: let her not forfeit it, then, without strong proofs. Torment not yourself before your time, by anticipating misfortunes. “Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.”

I fear your Sidley’s change of temper may be owing to the state of his affairs. I fancy he has not lately been very attentive to them. He has not your just pride, to conform his manner of life to his narrow income. Surely there cannot be a greater meanness than attempting to vie with people of ten times his fortune. They will despise him for it.

I have only time for a few lines: Sir Benjamin demands, and shall have my constant attendance.

attendance.—Adieu then, my true friend.—  
In all situations I am

Your's,

CLARA SCUDAMORE.

LETTER

## LETTER XXI.

MRS. SIDLEY TO LADY SCUDAMORE,

EVELING waits to convey this note. We shall greatly miss him; he is a worthy man: Sidley highly esteems him. Ah! had he been accustomed to choose friends like him, we both might have been happier.

Poor Sir Benjamin! But why do I pity him for leaving this miserable world? How few to me are its joys!

Lady Bell has been indisposed ever since our ball (I have called twice, without being admitted) in a high fever, her attendants say, and ordered to be kept quiet. If she is really so ill——Ought I to doubt it? Those cruel suspicions prey upon my heart:—I pine in thought. O that I could take your advice, and be blind, insensible and blind!—She may be innocent. I have naturally a tincture of jealousy in my composition; and  
that

that green-eyed monster often creates the food it feeds on.—But have I not lost my Sidley's love? Can I be deceived in the amazing change I find in him? Yet, I think, he has for some days past been more gentle in his manner to me. I have even caught him looking at me with a degree of tenderness mixed with compassion. Why compassion? But when that tormenting Summers approaches, his countenance changes, he eyes me with suspicious scrutiny. I fear some secret enemy has been endeavouring to prejudice him against me. Alas! ought he not to know me better? But he judges by his own inconstant heart:—mine is incapable of change.

He is gloomy and reserved; his gaiety is fled. Has he a grief of which I have not a right to share? Our circumstances must indeed be involved; but why will he not unbosom himself? why not consult with me, his truest friend? It is full time that they were arranged. Let him but restore to me his alienated heart, and I set at defiance the frowns of fortune: but he, I fear, will sink under the pressure of adversity. He was born for the busy scenes of life—how different from me!



With him for ever I in woods could rest,  
Where never foot before the ground had prest.

Miss West has just called on me, to ask  
me to pay a visit to Lady Bell. I attend her.  
Adieu till my return.

---

IN CONTINUATION.

Ah! my dear, how can I doubt? But I  
will, if possible, be silent, and let my stifled  
grief, like a cankering worm, consume my  
early prime.

Our visit was not, I fancy, very accepta-  
ble: it was visibly unexpected. We found  
the Lady in an elegant *deshabillé*; — so far  
was in character for a sick person; but bar-  
ring an air less gay than usual, I saw not in  
her countenance any traces of her violent  
illness: on the contrary, she never appeared  
more attractive. And as our entrance (for  
what reason I will not pretend to say) gave  
a sudden flush to her complexion, we had no  
pretence to condole with her on her altered  
looks.

looks. Why did she blush? Was it because we found my inconstant Sidley seated by her side? Was it because he held her unreluctant hand pressed between his? or was it a little remains of virtue, which made her ashamed to see the woman whom she had, under the pretence of friendship, robbed of all she held dear, the woman whose happiness she had destroyed for ever?

At our entrance they both rose, or rather started up. — “Pray, don’t let us disturb you, good folks,” cried Miss West, ironically; “I am sorry to have disconcerted so comfortable a *tête-à-tête*; are not you, Mrs. Sidley?” turning to me! — I was too much affected, too sad to make a speech such as most wives would have made. I was silent. Sidley (as if to shew that what he dared do he dared justify) said, with a disdainful smile, ‘You are very successful in your attempt to be smart this morning, Madam; but you apply to a wrong person for assistance: Louisa has no talents for raillery.’ “No, nor for railing neither,” interrupted I, with some spirit, “though the present style of husbands are very well calculated to teach one that accomplishment.” “But if

all husbands were like me,' returned he, carelessly, 'wives would not think it worth their while to amuse themselves in that way, since it would answer no manner of purpose.'

Lady Bell, who was not much more at her ease than me, in order to change the subject, asked if we chose any refreshment after our walk? Sidley's speech had piqued me into some degree of spirit. I thanked her for her civility; but said, that the pleasure of finding her ladyship so much better than I expected, and the additional pleasure of finding Mr. Sidley so gay, and in such remarkable good-humour, rendered refreshment unnecessary: I could not be sensible of any want in such good company.—"Excellent," cried Miss West, with a loud laugh: "no talents for raillery, did you say? why, she is quite a dab at it."

At that moment in came Summers.—  
"Ah, wretch!" continued she, turning to him, "what brought you here?—you have interrupted the most charming dialogue. We were all in such sweet spirits!" 'And why does my presence interrupt it?' said he,

he, 'I should be happy to partake.' "You have long admired Mrs. Sidley," resumed the trifler, "but you would have been doubly wounded, had you heard her wit." 'Yes, I believe he would,' cried Sidley, with an air of malice, 'had he heard it; but it was more than any body else could discover.' "A husband is the last person," said I, wounded to the soul by his unkindness, "whom one must expect to discover the perfections of his wife." 'And a husband now-a-days,' returned he, colouring with resentment, 'is the last person to whom a wife thinks it worth her while to display them.'

I could go no farther: I felt myself quite ill; my head grew giddy: I rose in haste to go into the air. Summers, with officious gallantry, seeing, I suppose, the change of my complexion, flew to offer his hand:—though he was the last person in the world whom I should have chosen to assist me, yet I was too ill to think of consequences. I must have sunk but for his supporting arm. He led me to the garden, and, seating me on a garden-chair, knelt before me. I was distressed. I made signs for him to quit his

E 3

ridiculous



ridiculous posture, but I had not power to speak; I was almost deprived of sense and motion. At that moment I saw Sidley advance: I strove to rise, in order to meet him, but sunk down again: mean time he hurried by, darting at me a look that pierced my heart. I uttered a faint scream, clasped my hands together, and fell back on the seat in a fainting fit. I know not how long it was before I recovered, but, on opening my eyes, I found Miss West and Lady Bell's maid assisting Summers in applying proper remedies. Her ladyship condescended not to make her appearance. I insisted on going home. Miss West's chariot waited for her; they led me to it; and I was carried there more dead than alive. I made my acknowledgments to the lady, and retired to my apartment; where I sent for my child. The sight of that dear innocent produced a flood of tears, which greatly relieved me. I indulged for half an hour a sad luxury of grief, then sat down to write to my Clara.

Sidley is not yet returned.—Was I so much to blame?—O, my cousin! what advantage have I reaped by all my former patience?



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tience? And have I said so much?—But that provoking Summers—My mind is in a state of inexpressible anxiety.—Let him but return, I ask no more: I can bear his anger;—but his absence is insupportable.

Adieu: I can write no more.

LOUISA SIDLEY.

## LETTER XXII.

LADY SCUDAMORE TO MRS. SIDLEY.

I Am distressed for you, my dear cousin. I could wish, as you had so long acted the Patient Grissel, you had been able at your last interview with that Lady Bell, to have mastered your passion. However provoking the circumstances were, it was perhaps the very worst opportunity you could have found, to exert that spirit which you manifested: things had, I fear, gone too far, and the affair was too recent for it to make a proper impression. But be comforted, Sidley is by this time, I make no doubt, returned. Let him now, for a while, follow his own devices: things of that nature, sooner or later, meet their just reward, and end in repentance and disgust: your conscious virtue will support you, while he will sink under a sense of his guilt.

Lady Bell, if she has fallen (as there is but too much reason to suppose) will be a warning

warning to me, and teach me in time to govern my passions, since I see it is difficult to say to them, "So far shalt thou go, and no farther."—I must do her the justice to say, that, for a great while, she certainly did not deceive you: her friendship was real, nor did she mean to injure you. She was ruined by placing too much confidence in her own strength. Believe me, though at present she may seem to triumph, she will be ere long (will, did I say—is she not at present?) an object of pity as well as contempt.

Sir Benjamin continues dangerously ill: no hopes of his recovery, though he may linger for some days longer.—Eveling and I are wretched company to each other: no situation can be more awkward or distressing. He is still determined on his American scheme: he talked of it last night, till I was too much softened.—Ah! are we not already separated for ever? Sir Benjamin has not been well enough, since his return, to enter into any conversation with him, though he has hinted that he has something of consequence to say to him, and seems apprehensive that it will not be in his power, from

his great weakness. What can it be, I wonder? yet why should I have any curiosity, since I can have no concern in it?—I expect the physicians every moment, to pronounce their last definitive sentence. Poor man! I feel for his sufferings; which he bears with uncommon patience.

Adieu, my dear.—Write to me: I am all anxiety to know what has passed between you and your incensed good man.—That Summers is ridiculous: he seems to pester you, out of the pure love of mischief. I am sure he can have no hopes.

Once more adieu.

CLARA SCUDAMORE.

LETTER

## LETTER XXIII.

MRS. SIDLEY TO LADY SCUDAMORE.

O Clara! it is now six tedious days since my Sidley left me. I know not what is become of him. I am no longer deemed worthy of his least attention.—I have never had my cloaths off since that fatal day, for ever to be lamented. I have admitted nobody. I am shut up in my apartment; where I spend my nights and days in tears.—Alas! I shall not long have an apartment to shelter me. Our creditors are clamorous; they threaten to seize the small remains of our fortune.—Let them, I have now nothing of value to lose.

Where, I wonder, is Lady Bell?—Can I doubt?—An object of pity do you call her?—O! is there an object on earth who can claim any pity but myself? Who is so wretched as the heart-broken Louisa?

My



My child stretches out her little arms.—  
My love, what can thy poor afflicted mother  
do for thee?—We are undone, my child:  
thy father has deserted us: he has fled from  
thy smiles, thy innocent endearments. \*

But why do I write? you suffer enough,  
my cousin. I will restrain my pen, and  
again sit me down to weep.

LETTER

## LETTER XXIV.

LADY ISABELLA CONWAY TO MISS WEST.

**I**N spite of my fall (for, blushing, I have told you all my weakness) you continue my friend. Indeed, you are above vulgar prejudices as well as myself: we both act and think like rational beings. Can the customs of different countries alter the immutable laws of right and wrong?—The Turks (for example) so far from esteeming polygamy a sin, allow the worshippers of the prophet as many wives as they can maintain.—If conscience is implanted as a monitor in our breast, how comes theirs so peaceably to suffer them to enjoy their pleasure? The Jews, too, even the patriarchs, had, without offence to their help-mates, the comfort of handmaids:—and we Christians, what do our laws allow us? Why, when tired of a first choice, the conveniency of a divorce, and so we choose again. What great crime then have I committed, in becoming the handmaid of my Sidley?—and yet

yet I suffered so much from shame, from indignation at myself for having fallen (such is the prejudice of education) that it was long before I could reason away my un-casiness.

I swear to you, my friend, I had no (what is called) criminal intention when I first indulged my passion; I thought the sweet pleasure of loving was sufficient. How weak was that supposition!—Are our feelings so easily governed? No: on the contrary, I believe it to be as impossible to stop the progress of a predominant passion, as it is to arrest a stone falling from a precipice, by a word. The stone, by the force of gravitation, rests not till it falls to the center; nor will our passions, when once strongly agitated, stop till they are gratified.

There is more truth than is generally imagined, in what the poet, intending to be arch, says:

If weak women go astray,  
Their fears are more in fault than they.

It is true also, that chastity once forfeited, modesty, shame, and pride soon follow.

At

At first, I vowed never more to behold my lovely conqueror; vowed, by a life devoted to weeping and penitence, to make atonement for my fault. In this humour I continued for almost a week (a great while, as you must allow). I shut myself up in my apartment; was denied to all my friends, and sickened even at the sight of the sun: I would not even admit my charming enslaver; and wished to conceal from his wife the fatal adventure. But was it in nature long to support a life like that? What recompence did I reap from the sacrifice? To pine in solitude, devoured with melancholy and fruitless remorse; no chearful ray of hope, no consolatory reflections! Human nature could not bear it. My passion for Sidley, too, more violent for being restrained—— You know the rest.

His wife's imprudent anger, and Summers's assiduity, hastened our fate. He was exasperated, and I was desperate.—— I offered to follow him to whatever part of the world he thought proper. The plan was easily settled: we set off for town next morning. To you only I revealed my secret before I left Belmont, but was not at the  
time



time quite determined what place to retire to. We fixed on London; where we could most easily conceal ourselves, in a part of it where we are totally unknown.—I send you a direction.

Write to me, dear Maria: let me know what the world says of my flight. Yet why should I wish to know? I will endeavour to despise its censures. I have lost my virtue, and my nature seems totally changed: if it were not, should I not pity—— Let me not name her:—she is supported by the pride of conscious worth; a refined pleasure suited to such angelic minds. Let her then leave the grosser satisfactions to me, who am fallen, like a star that sets to rise no more. O! I could curse:—but it is past; so I must make the best of my fate.

Sidley is but a half-fledged sinner: he is often gloomy, and in his sleep starts, groans, and often sighs forth the hated name of his Louisa. Can I tamely bear this? But what avail my reproaches? I fear now, I conquered him as much by the jealousy we excited in regard to Summers, as any other passion.—That fatal masquerade! Heated with dancing—the close embowering shade

to



to which we retired! Ah! it was not perhaps any preference to me:—the time, the place, the weakness, of human nature:—any other female might at the time have proved equally seducing.—Let me not indulge this suspicion, or it will drive me to madness. And thou, Sidley, take heed; beware how you give me reason to suspect your passion; for know that I can hate with as much violence as I can love; nor, if you forsake me, after making me the abject wretch I am, shall either heaven or earth protect thee from my vengeance.

O! I am got into a thorny path; and, I fear, have for ever lost the path of peace. Tears of pride and anguish rush into my eyes.—I lay down my pen.

LETTER

## LETTER XXV.

LADY SCUDAMORE TO MRS. SIDLEY.

**H**ASTEN, my Louisa, leave your dismal abode; I send Eveling for you.—Come to my arms, my poor afflicted mourner, and receive the consolation of my friendship. Come and share the fortune of your Clara.

Sir Benjamin has paid the debt of nature. He has been more lamented in his death, than I was able to esteem him in his life: his faults are now forgot, and with lasting gratitude will I remember his kindness. He has bestowed his favours on me with a liberal hand: his whole large estate is divided equally between Eveling and me. Eveling! O, my dear, what a tale have I to unfold! But at present, for your sake, I hate the inconstant sex; and, if I continue in my present resolution, he will be little the better for a discovery that has half-turned his head.

I feel,

I feel, when my spirits regain their proper tone, I shall be as gay and coquet as ever.—If you was but happy now!

I am no hypocrite: I will not pretend to more grief than I really experience. I have wept without affectation. A decent gravity is all you must now expect to find in me.

But have I not excited your curiosity? It is too long a story: I will have the pleasure of relating it to you in person. Only a hint:—Eveling is no relation of my late husband, but the son of a lady, a widow, with whom, in his youth, after she became such, he had an affair. (See what creatures men are, even the most decent of them.) On her death, he promised to adopt her son, and, as his father, who had been an officer, had left him only the honour of being descended from a man of bravery, &c.—Do I make myself clear? no matter at present; you shall at meeting have a full and particular account.—Sir Benjamin added a wish that I would, when at liberty, reward his faithful passion;—but that will demand a little consideration; for now I shall have half the world at my feet.—Alas! poor Eveling.

Do

Do not chide me for this seeming levity, my dear: I only trifle, in order to raise your spirits. I feel so happy to have it in my power to make your circumstances easy! Yes, positively, you shall share my fortune with me, and let the male creatures go and hang themselves; we will set at defiance all they can do to torment us. Hasten to ———: my arms and heart are open to receive you.

Adieu, my love.

CLARA SCUDAMORE.

LETTER

## LETTER XXVI.

MR. SIDLEY TO MR. EVELING.

**I** Thank you for your letter\*, my dear Eveling, and its very sensible and friendly contents;—but, ah! your advice comes too late. How can I expect to be forgiven a crime for which I can never pardon myself? And how, could I even hope for that blessing, is it possible for me to extricate myself from the accursed affair?—You know not the pride, the daring spirit of her I have to deal with. And indeed, can I, in honour, forsake her, after what is past; lost, ruined, despised, and depraved?

O, what a change have I made! Tormented with her jealousy, my days are embittered by her ceaseless upbraidings, and my nights are no less joyless. The violence of her passions converts her into a fury, and destroys all her charms. There is nothing soft nor feminine about her. How different from my injured Louisa!—Cursed be my  
inconstancy;

\* This letter does not appear.



inconstancy; even an angel could not fix me!

I feel now, too late, that I never had a real passion for this outrageous woman: it was the weak levity of an unsteady mind, fond of variety; and it was the change, of which my own imprudence was first the cause, in my Louisa:—she became melancholy and reserved; was constantly in tears: her fine eyes lost their lustre; her complexion faded: she no longer exerted any of her agreeable talents: I found no pleasure in her society, cool and insensible to my caresses. My home became gloomy, and drove me to seek that amusement from others which I no longer found in her company.

Lady Bell is handsome. I found her ever gay and entertaining: she flattered my vanity. We naturally love those who keep us in good-humour with ourselves.

Louisa piqued me, too, by encouraging, as I was made to believe, the assiduity of that coxcomb Summers. I now fear I injured her by my suspicions;—but you know not the  
the

the pains that were taken to render me jealous. I may add, that I, at last, fell by surprise; heated with wine and dancing, I was off my guard. It was in neither of us premeditated guilt.—The conquest was not difficult.—Too soon the morn and cool indifference came. I visited her with reluctance: I was not admitted;—but short was her fit of penitence.—The affair might have been concealed. I talked of prudence; but she passionately exclaimed, “No; since I have forfeited my own esteem, I scorn to play the hypocrite, for the poor consolation of, at best, a doubtful fame.” My wife’s behaviour at their first interview, hastened the discovery. I know I deserved her contempt; but yet I could not patiently submit to it. Lady Bell’s fiery spirit kept alive my resentment: she proposed flight. I was not master of my reason; she governed me at her pleasure.

We are in a retired part of the town; no society, and we are far from being good company to each other. How heavily the hours lag on! She is no longer that amusing creature who could, by her example, keep up a constant flow of spirits. I am forced  
to

to affect those raptures I no longer feel; and too easily does she distinguish the change. She is almost as weary of the insipid sameness of our life as myself. We wander in unfrequented walks; we return to yawn at each other: she sings, but her voice no longer charms me: she makes me read; lost in thought, I pause without knowing it. Her caresses no longer excite any emotion.—How irksome is solitude to minds like ours!

She has hinted a desire of our going to France; where, being unknown, we may mix with the world; but she little knows the powerful ties that bind me to my native country; or at least, she must not know the force they still have over me.—O, my injured wife, and my innocent deserted child! Have I not left them to poverty and wretchedness? I dare not reflect on that; it drives me to madness. By this time, perhaps, they are driven from their humble home, to want and beggary.—Eveling, save me from distraction; fly to their relief; let your Clara know their situation; let her protect her friend, and save my child from ruin.

I can

I can write no more, the thought unmans me.—Monster that I am; for one moment of guilty pleasure, I have undone myself, and all who had the misfortune to be connected with me.

C. SIDLEY.

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LETTER



## LETTER XXVII.

MRS. SIDLEY TO LADY SCUDAMORE.

**I** Thank you a thousand times, my dear cousin, for your kind intention in my favour. — In the midst of all my afflictions, what a blessing do I possess in your friendship! — a blessing which has been my greatest support.

But, my dear, a very surprising reverse of fortune has befallen me since I last wrote: an event which, a few weeks ago, would have filled me with transport; but now fortune can ill supply the loss of him I love. What are her favours, when Sidley does not share them with me? — Poverty, while I possessed his heart, was a thousand times preferable to the greatest affluence: yet let me not be ungrateful to Providence for this unexpected bounty.

You remember my father's friend, Sir George Selby. You must recollect that he  
went



went abroad for the recovery of his health, after his duel with my husband.—O, what scenes does this subject recal to my memory! how is that husband changed since that time! —Let me only wipe off those fast-falling tears, and I will proceed.—Last night, after my little family were at rest, I, from whom slumber has long taken its flight,—who lay indulging my melancholy reflections, and gazing, by the dim glimmering of a lamp, on the sweet countenance of my child, bewailing the wretched situation to which we were reduced,—was alarmed with the rattling of a carriage, which drove up to the gate; and instantly a loud knocking was heard at the door. A trembling seized me: “Can it, can it,” exclaimed I, clasping my hands, “be my Sidley? Ah! what brings him at this late hour? What new misfortune have I to encounter? He is ill, he is dying, or he would not be brought home to me.” A servant heard the noise also, and, looking out of the window, enquired “Who’s there?” A voice answered, ‘I must see Mr. Sidley, or his lady.’ Prepossessed with the idea that I should either see or hear of my husband, I hurried down:—but judge my surprise, when a man, who told me he

was an attorney, presented me with a packet, parchments, &c. and told me the packet contained letters from the late Sir George Selby, and that the parchments were his will; that he had left me sole heir and executrix. He made an apology for disturbing me at so unseasonable an hour, but said he hoped the welcome news he brought would make me amends for his intrusion; adding, that he had travelled post without stopping to bait.—I instantly ordered him some refreshment, and, after he had drank a glass or two of wine, he read me the will, as I also did the generous Sir George's letter; which is too long to transcribe, so I inclose it for your perusal.

And now, my dear cousin, behold me mistress of five thousand a year, a noble country-seat completely furnished with plate, carriages, &c. and what adds to my pleasure, I find that seat is in your neighbourhood.—What an event!—I fall on my knees with grateful thankfulness.

Your Eveling will be here to-morrow, as I find by your letter.—O, my cousin, I shall witness your happiness too. Trifle not  
with

with him : he is the most amiable of men, and has given convincing proofs of his constancy.—Were my Sidley but here now—— Alas ! my spirits sink again ; for can we ever be re-united ? Is a heart once lost ever to be regained ?

I shall beg leave to employ your friend as my 'squire, while I pay a visit to my new possessions, and also to assist me in settling my affairs ; I know you will, though perhaps with a little reluctance, spare him to me.—And do you think I shall be long in your neighbourhood without seeing you ?—O, what a meeting will it be !

If I cannot regain my husband's love, I will at least have the pleasure of making him happy, of enabling him to enjoy that world where he is so formed to shine.—My child, too——

Adieu, my dear.—I hasten to dispatch this, to make you a sympathetic sharer in my felicity.

Your's ever,

LOUISA SIDLEY.

LETTER

## LETTER XXVIII.

LADY ISABELLA CONWAY TO MISS WEST.

O Maria, too late do I experience the fatal consequence of uncontrouled passion! I feel with anguish the shame, the contempt to which a woman gives herself up, when she has gratified a criminal inclination; and I feel too, severely feel, the treachery, the ingratitude of that inconstant creature man. Could I have believed it of Sidley? Is it thus he rewards a heart which has sacrificed to him all it ought to hold sacred? O that fatal, that exquisite moment! Is it to be followed by a whole life of anguish and regret? If I was an easy conquest, still I fell not without temptation:—he alone, of all mankind, was formed for my undoing.—How many prostrate lovers have I slighted!—He has effectually revenged their cause by his unkindness.

But why do I yield to this womanly weakness of vain complaining? it ill becomes my



haughty spirit. I will steel my breast against every softer passion, and revenge alone shall from henceforth engross my heart.—Not another sigh shall heave this bosom, nor shall my indignant eyes be suffered to drop another tear; or if,

— in spite of scorn,  
Tears, such as angels weep, burst forth,

his treacherous heart shall repay them with as many drops of blood. I have already formed the plan.—He talks of prudence; talks of his wife and child; he dares even to hint at our separation.—Well, let him go, at his peril.—I will not tell you my scheme till it is better digested.—The thought supports my spirits.

Belville has discovered the place of my retreat:—he may prove a fit tool for my revenge; I know I can mould him to my pleasure; or if not, I have other resources.—He shall not escape the just vengeance of your incensed

I. CONWAY.

LETTER

## LETTER XXIX.

MRS. SIDLEY TO MR. SIDLEY,

O My Sidley! I have seen your letter to Mr. Eveling. I have wept over the heart-reviving contents. — You do not hate me then: you still feel a tenderness for your grateful Louisa! Return then to her arms, which are open to receive you. — Not one reproach have you to fear: I will only punish my charming truant by an excess of love.

Think not of the past, my Sidley; fortune now smiles; she loads us with her favours, and the rest of our days will be crowned with happiness and peace. — O, if I had thee once again, I would so chain thee to me by my caresses, and every art I am mistress of, to please, that thou shouldst never more be able to escape me. — I confess my fault; I have been too negligent: but thy home shall now be so endeared to thee, that you will no longer wish to roam. —

Thy child too, my beloved, waits with im-

patience to load thee with her little fond caresses. Do you not long to press her to your heart? Does not your bosom glow at the thought?

O how, my Sidley, shall I meet  
The man I've lov'd so long?  
Will love in all our pulses beat,  
And falter on our tongue?

You cannot conceive, my Sidley, of what a charming place you are now master. The house, the furniture, and the delightful gardens, will fill you with rapture to behold them.—Our amiable cousin, too, how will her vivacity amuse you, and enliven our parties! She is now with me, as is her worthy lover. They are impatient for your return; impatient to assure you of their unalterable friendship.—Need I say more? Every moment will appear an age, till you are pressed to the fond heart of

Your

LOUISA SIDLEY.

LETTER

## LETTER XXX.

MR. SIDLEY TO MRS. SIDLEY.

NO, Louisa, best and most injured of women, I left thee, with savage cruelty, to poverty and wretchedness; forsook thy charms for one so every way thy inferior, that nothing but a total depravity of nature could tempt me to it. Think no more of me; I am not worthy of thy least regard: enjoy the good fortune, which is the just reward of thy virtue, and leave me to the punishment I merit. If you had still been in the indigent situation in which, like an unfeeling monster, I left you, I would this moment have flown to you, deeply sensible of my error; would have flown to console and share thy wretchedness: but think me not so very abject a creature as to return to thee now, when you may have just reason to think it is only to share thy prosperity. No, I never now can convince thy delicate mind of my unaltered love, of my sincere repentance; leave me then, I say, to the fate I merit.

My



My resolution is fixed.--May you be happy, while I drag on a miserable life, far distant from thee, a voluntary exile from my country. I will go a volunteer to America; there meet a nobler fate than my crimes deserve, or else return to thee more worthy of thy charms. Urge me not then to act dishonourably, against my better judgment: strive not to move me by thy softness. I was not born to enjoy the felicity you offer me: fortune has frowned on me almost from my birth: she bestowed only one treasure on me, which, like a senseless spendthrift, I threw away. That gift was thee, my amiable Louisa; but I have forfeited all claim to thee; I have proved myself unworthy of thy charms.

Adieu then, my injured wife.--Take care of our child, that dear pledge of mutual love; and that every blessing may await you, shall ever be the prayer of your penitent and unfortunate

SIDLEY.

LETTER



## LETTER XXXI.

LADY SCUDAMORE TO MR. SIDLEY.

**Y**OU are excessively silly, Sidley, with your ridiculous delicacy:—I have no patience. So, because you have not already had misfortunes enough, you choose to create imaginary ones. Pr'ythee let us have no more of such whining stuff! If you do not instantly set off, on the receipt of this, I swear I will go in person;—and see then if you dare refuse compliance with my positive commands.

I want you here of all things.—This Eveling is quite foolish, as all you men are, when you fancy yourselves at the end of your hopes and fears; but he may find himself mistaken.—Winter approaches, I shall go to dear London, and then let him see to it. My little head will be half-turned by the admiration I expect to meet with; so many beaux at my feet; and he, honest man, has  
not

not the least vestige of that showy animal in his whole composition.—In the mean time, till the season is proper for that dear expedition, I order your immediate presence here. I want somebody to flirt with, in order to make him look about him; and as you are a man of GALLANTRY, you know, I cannot suppose you will have any objection to a little RADINAGE with a sprightly young widow; who, I assure you, becomes her weeds, and looks amazingly.

As to your Louisa,

Whate'er she does, where'er her steps she bends,  
Grace on each action silently attends.

—By the way, your last ridiculous letter has made her quite miserable: she sees you already engaged in all the horrors of war. I do all I can to keep up her spirits;—but you are a savage, if you do not hasten to relieve her fears. Do not be foolish then, I repeat, but set off instantly on the receipt of this; your chamber is already adorned for your reception. You will be enchanted with your new mansion: the library, the drawing-room,

room, the music-parlour, and, above all, the picture-gallery is superb; and for the pleasure-grounds, the prospects, the woods, the groves, they beggar all description.—— Come, for I long to stroll with you, because, when you please, you can be a very agreeable companion: besides, of an evening, now they are somewhat long, I want you to make up a pool at quadrille, if it were only to stop Eveling's eternal soft nonsense. At present, we are forced to put up with your old friend Mrs. Palmerstone, who has taken a violent fancy to your Louisa, because, as she is not at present much in a humour for talking, she can have all the conversation to herself; and because she seems to listen to her eternal pedigree.

As to Lady Bell, as she seduced you, I see not that you have any thing in her regard to answer for; she must take the consequence of her own imprudence: she has still a large fortune to console her; and, as pleasure seems to be her sole pursuit, she may with that still purchase as much as she pleases.—Take my word for it, she will not break her heart for you; which, I suppose, your worship has the vanity to fear. A woman

man of her turn is not capable of constancy ; that is only the attendant of true and delicate love :—her's for you, was of a very different nature ; so there ought to be no lets or hinderances from that quarter. Leave an eloquent epistle for her on her dressing-table, then mount your horse and set off.

The inclosed is another letter from your Louisa, in the plaintive style, in case mine should fail of moving you. Let her not plead in vain, as you value your own happiness and the favour of

Your friend,

CLARA SCUDAMORE.

LETTER



## LETTER XXXII.

MR. SIDLEY TO MRS. SIDLEY.

**T**AKE me; do with me what you please: henceforth I have no will but your's. But, ah! my love, I feel a sad foreboding, that I shall never arrive at that exquisite happiness to which you so eloquently invite me.—My crime renders me unworthy, and inexorable justice will be satisfied, though you so kindly pardon.—There is a load on my spirits, which all my reasoning cannot shake off.

But I obey.—To you, my Louisa, I come—I fly to thee, be the consequence what it will.—Your rival, as you call her (long, my angel, has she ceased to be so) knows not of my intended departure: I dare not hint it to her, her rage would know no bounds; but I must write to her. What a task! What language shall I use to calm her fury?

Her



Her temper knows no middle state;  
Alike extreme in love and hate!

If fate permits, by to-morrow evening  
you may expect me at your feet, truly pen-  
itent, with a heart wholly your's.

CHARLES SIDLEY.

LETTER

## LETTER XXXIII.

LADY SCUDAMORE TO MR. SIDLEY.

SIDLEY, where are you? What detains you? We have received your letter: we have expected you these two days with rack-ing impatience. Louisa is almost distracted with her apprehensions: Eveling is set off post haste for town, to know the cause of your delay.—Ah! how can you thus torment us?—If we do not see you to-night, the consequence will be dreadful. There is no describing the situation of my friend. O hasten to restore us to ourselves. I am myself most dreadfully alarmed.—Sidley, you know not how dear you are to us all.

I can write no more. What a day will this be!—How shall I be able to support your Louisa?

CLARA SCUDAMORE.

LETTER

## LETTER XXXIV.

LADY ISABELLA CONWAY TO MISS WEST.

AND did he thus hope to escape me?— Ah! he knows but little of Calista. I have him safe caught in the snare I had most artfully laid for him.

What fools are men!—How easily did I work the credulous doating Belville to my purpose! And does he think I will reward him as I promised?— Insolent wretch! Am I then fallen so low, as to be the wanton he supposes; the easy prey of every one that takes the pains to solicit my favours? No, though lost to fame, and to my own esteem, Sidley alone could have subdued me: for his sake, I hate, I detest the whole perfidious sex: revenge is now the only passion of which this haughty and indignant heart is capable.—He is cut off in the height of his exultation, in the midst of his flattering hopes, when his soul beat high with raptures at the happiness which he vainly  
flattered

flattered himself awaited him.—Short is the triumph of my hated rival.—Now let her rage, like me; let her know what it is to lose the man she doats on; for she will never behold him more. I too have him for ever. Ah! who can bear to be a wretch for ever?—What a desert now appears the world!—Where shall I fly for comfort? Would I could fly from myself!—Why was I born with such ungovernable passions?—But I will not long endure this wretchedness.

Adieu, my friend. My fate is not yet determined, but I feel it will be dreadful.

I. CONWAY.

LETTER

## LETTER XXXV.

SIR JOHN BELVILLE TO MR. SUMMERS.

DEAR Summers, hasten to Barnet; poor Sidley lies there, dangerously wounded:--wounded by me!--Urged on by a revengeful woman, I have done a deed, of which I, too late, repent.--And yet, what would I not do to be master of such a world of charms?

And did he not deserve my hate, for having perverted the noblest mind that ever animated a human form?---for having deceived me, too, by a pretended indifference for her, when I made him the confident of my passion,---when he knew I adored her?---It is past.---He dies,---and I must become an exile from my country. But will not she accompany me in my flight? She has sworn to do so. O then, with her I love, every place must to me be a paradise!--I go to claim her promise, and then a long adieu to England. Mean time, hasten to your friend;  
I fear



I fear there is no hopes of his recovery. He fought with bravery, but my Genius was the stronger.

Go and comfort his poor Louisa. As he fell, her name faltered on his tongue. He was hastening to her, with all the impatience of a lover.—But how uncertain is every thing in this vain world! After struggling, as he had done, with adversity, just when fortune smiled, he was cut off in the bloom of youth, and the height of his flattering prospects!—Poor Sidley! once thy friend, now thy murderer!—Too late I regret the rash deed.

Adieu.—Lose no time; let him have all the assistance in your power.

BELVILLE.

LETTER

## LETTER XXXVI.

MR. EVELING TO LADY SCUDAMORE.

O My Clara, to what a scene have I been witness! What will become of the unfortunate Louisa? And how will you, my angel, be able to communicate to her the dreadful tidings?

I travelled post; but just before I reached Barnet, a man—his horse in a foam, and whose livery I knew to be that of Mr. Summers—stopped me, and delivered a letter. I was struck with horror at the fatal contents. It informed me that our poor friend lay at an inn, dangerously wounded by Sir John Belville: that Mr. Summers was with him; and that he was not expected to live many hours. I hastened, overwhelmed with grief, to the place directed; and there indeed I found the melancholy news confirmed. He was quite insensible for some time after my arrival. I never saw a man more affected than Summers. It will, I hope, prove an  
useful

useful lesson to him, and teach him the consequence of unlawful love: he, who has long prided himself on that no less wicked than silly character of a man of gallantry.

Our poor Sidley, on his wounds being dressed, was, by the torture it occasioned, restored to his senses. He saw me by his bed-side; he wrung my hand. "O Eveling! see the fatal punishment my crimes have merited!" cried he, in a faint voice. "Never, never more shall I behold my Louisa! And who shall comfort that dear mourner? Let me be carried to her. I ask no more than to receive her last forgiveness, and to die in her arms. Heaven," added he, raising his languid eyes, "in thy mercy, spare me: let me but live to see her once again, to press her to this penitent heart: let me but see my child, and I will, un murmuring, submit to my fate."

He is so impatient, weak as he is, to continue his journey, that I know not what to do. In vain I remonstrate. He says, he knows he cannot live, why then refuse him the only consolation that is left? I told him I would write to you; that his Louisa would

instantly attend him: but he is not to be reasoned with; and, if he is not better to-morrow, I fear I shall be forced to indulge him; for his great desire to go to Selby-Hall affects his head, and aggravates his danger.

I am fent for.—Alas! my beloved Clara, he is in the agonies of death. What (I repeat) will become of his wife? how shall we be able to comfort her?—Dear Clara, what a task is your's!

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## IN CONTINUATION.

IT is all over, my beloved Clara. Your friend, the once gay and much-admired Sidley, is no more. He expired in my arms, praying for the happiness of his Louisa.—I have closed his eyes, and now sit by his lifeless corpse, a sad and silent mourner.

Summers has entreated me to write, on my arrival at Selby-Hall, to let him know how the poor Louisa supports the afflictive stroke.



stroke. You, my angel, must do your best to prepare her for the sad scene she will soon be witness to.—It was his last request, that his body might be conveyed to the hall, and deposited near her father. “And, O!” added he, “though I shall never more behold her angelic face, yet it may be some consolation to her to see me once more, before I am consigned to my native dust: she will embalm me with her tears.”—The coffin will be left unscrewed, and to-morrow morning the sad procession will set off.

I hasten to you, my Clara; and we will unite our best endeavours to console our lovely friend.—It shall now be the whole study of my life to merit the enviable felicity that awaits me; to render you happy, and to soothe the sorrows of her who is most dear to you—a grateful task to your devoted

EVELING.



## LETTER XXXVII.

MR. EVELING TO MR. SUMMERS.

**A**GREEABLE to my promise, I write to you, Mr. Summers. — But what language can do justice to the melancholy scene? — My Clara had prepared her for our arrival: she had, on the first discovery of the fatal affair, fallen from one fit into another, for several hours, till her life was despaired of: but the soft voice of friendship, and her native patience, had at last softened her anguish.

She rose early the morning we were expected, and made her appearance in deep mourning. When I entered the parlour, I found her in the arms of her Clara, her head resting on her bosom. She had fainted on seeing the hearse, and her friend, all bathed in tears, was using her best endeavours for her recovery. — What a fine picture would those two loveliest of women have made! But what painter could have done justice to  
the

the fine expression of my Clara's sympathizing countenance?

Louisa recovered soon after I entered. She raised her languid head. I hastened to her. She rose to meet me. "Where is he? O, Mr. Eveling, where are the cold remains of my Sidley?—How her figure struck me! She held her handkerchief in her hand, her fine eyes were raised to heaven, her face pale as death.—"I have lost him, Mr. Eveling," cried she; "all I held dear on earth. My Sidley is dead and cold. I shall never more hear his charming voice, never more behold his looks of cordial love. O thou world!" continued she, "how shall I now support the weight of my miserable existence?—My Sidley! my husband! best beloved of men! I have lost thee for ever!"—She burst into a flood of tears. At last, wiping off the pearly drops, she turned to me, with a more composed air, "Yes, I will see thee once again: I will gaze upon that dear face, before it is for ever hid from my eyes?"

I led her, in silence, to the apartment where they had placed his coffin. As we advanced, her whole frame was agitated.

She disengaged herself from me, and hastily advanced towards it.—Poor Sidley!—How awful is the sight of death!—What a change appeared in his late animated countenance!—She stood looking on him, her hands clasped in each other, and appeared like a statue, the statue of despair. At last she stooped down. She repeatedly kissed his cold lips, she bathed his face with her tears, but uttered not one single complaint; then heaving a deep sigh, “farewel, my first, my last, my only love, farewel for ever.”—She turned and gave me her hand, with such an air of anguish, yet with a dignity in her grief, that made her appear something more than human.—“Lead me, Sir,” said she; “let me go and seek consolation where alone it is to be found.”—I conducted her to the door of her apartment.—May Heaven support her!

I returned to my beloved Clara, who stood almost as much in need of consolation; for never women better loved each other. They have been friends from childhood, and, I hope, will now end their days together; for I do not believe that ever Louisa will be prevailed on to make a second choice.

I know

I know not yet the fate of that wretched creature Isabella: but, sooner or later, I doubt not, she will meet the fate she merits. If you can gain any intelligence of her, be so obliging as to let me know.

I am, dear Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

EVELING.

F I N I S.

A. N. O. V. E. L. 139

I have not yet had of this work  
any more. I believe that I  
should not say with the  
If you can give me any more of this, I  
obliging as to let me know.



I am, dear Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

W. L. G.

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